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15 July 1963

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MEMORANDUM FOR : [REDACTED]
Headquarters, USAF

ATTENTION : Colonel Leo W. Gentry

SUBJECT : Carrier Launch Capability for U-2 Aircraft

1. As you are aware, this organization has been studying for some time the feasibility of adapting one or two U-2 aircraft to carrier operations, including the launching and retrieval of the aircraft from certain adequate United States Navy carriers of the CVA or attack class. Visits have been made in the last two months to Naval Air Training Command, Pensacola, where the USS LINCOLN (CVS) was inspected for adequacy, and later to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where the USS INDEPENDENCE (CVA) was visited for the same purpose. Engineering studies based in part on earlier efforts in this direction made by Kelly Johnson at our request and subsequently for SAC have also been undertaken by Lockheed. A final Staff Study on the operational feasibility of modifying two aircraft for carrier use is presently in work and will be submitted to the DCI shortly for his views and approval. If approval is forthcoming, we are hopeful that by early 1964 a capability of this sort will be attained.

2. As an interim measure, however, it became apparent that it would be possible in meeting certain high-priority covert collection requirements to launch from a CVA class carrier and retrieve at a land base somewhere within range. Accordingly, the undersigned suggested to the DDCI in a staff paper that if national requirements dictated the coverage of certain critical [REDACTED] intelligence targets, consideration should be given to a covert launch from a Sixth Fleet CVA carrier with retrieval at a land base such as [REDACTED]. While subsequent events have made this [REDACTED] coverage less critical,

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the DCI has directed that we undertake to check out the carrier launch and land retrieve capability as soon as possible so that it will represent a capability in being between now and the achievement of a complete launch and retrieve envelope next year. The only mechanical problem standing between ourselves and the conduct of such a checkout of a launch from the carrier is the completion of fabrication by Lockheed of an inexpensive hoisting sling for the U-2 aircraft and the fabrication of a fuselage cart which will permit side casting movement of the aircraft from the elevator to the hangar deck and from the hangar deck to the flight deck. Several of our [REDACTED] pilots were checked out last month in simulated U-2 takeoffs from the USS INDEPENDENCE conducted in Navy TF aircraft which has analogous dimensions and approximates the takeoff speeds of the U-2. It was their unanimous opinion that takeoff would be no problem indeed.

3. In the course of this preliminary feasibility investigation, we have been dealing with Captain Martin D. Carmody, USN, OP-506 in the Pentagon. The DNI and the Chief of Naval Support have also been aware of these on-site investigations, and the latter officer has also furnished engineering advisory personnel to Kelly Johnson to aid in this aspect of the study. A check with Captain Carmody reveals that a training takeoff can be arranged for some time during the period 3 through 16 August 1963 on the USS KITTY HAWK, which during that period will be in a training status without its air carrier group aboard operating from San Diego, California. Launch and retrieval communications for this operation would be handled through the carrier's SSB facility, and only a minimum launch party would be aboard for a single day. Present plans are that the aircraft used for this training exercise would be marked with [REDACTED]. We are, therefore, making preliminary plans to accommodate this training mission with a recovery at [REDACTED] following a launch at sea during this period. It is anticipated that this schedule can be accommodated in such a way as to involve no change in the normal training regime of the USS KITTY HAWK and, therefore, it is Captain Carmody's view that JCS concurrence is not a requisite.

4. It would be appreciated, however, if you would be good enough to generally advise the Acting D/NRO of the contemplated training operation and

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to communicate with us promptly if it is his view that further top level coordination is required.

FOR THE ACTING DEPUTY DIRECTOR (RESEARCH):

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By _____

cc: Capt. Carmody

cc: DDCI
ADD/R

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